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Industrial Bakery Workers Fight For Dignity In NYC

By X365454, NYC GMB

“My coworkers and I are here because we work hard every day, transporting Tom Cat bread within and around New York,” said Fellow Worker Dario Pinos to a senior executive at the plant, who was surrounded by dozens of coworkers and allies. “We wake up early. We risk our safety on the roads, and we rush to make our deliveries on time to make sure Tom Cat’s service is top quality in the market. In return for our hard work, we do not get the respect we deserve,” added Pinos, who is a 14-year veteran of the company.

With the stage set, a group of Tom Cat Bakery workers proceeded to read a “Declaration of Dignity” calling for respect from an abusive manager, the maintenance of health benefits and equality amongst all drivers. The workers, who are largely Latin American immigrants, gathered on March 7 to march on their boss with worker and student allies representing a variety of groups, including Occupy Wall Street, Immigrant Worker Justice, Jornaleros

Unidos de Woodside, the Laundry Workers Center, the Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York and Domestic Workers United. The action marked the launch of a powerful direct action campaign at the prominent Queens-based bread supplier in the face of an aggressive attempt by the factory’s new private equity owners to degrade working conditions.

“Tom Cat Wobblies will not sacrifice their families so Wall Street investors can pocket more profits,” said Diana Marino, an organizer with Focus on the Food Chain. “Through the power of solidarity and everyday direct action, these members will transform Tom Cat and help transform their industry.”

The action represents the latest effort in the growing Focus on the Food Chain movement for good jobs and a sustainable food system in New York City’s industrial food sector. The sector

Continued on 5



Tom Cat workers march in Queens on March 7.

Photo: Grace Goldfarb

Living Wage Victory For IWW Cleaners In London



The Exchange Tower cleaners celebrate their victory.

Photo: iww.org.uk

By Chris Ford

On March 5, after a long and high-profile campaign, the IWW secured a victory for our cleaner members employed at Exchange Tower who will now be paid the London living wage of £8.30 per hour. For ten years many members have been earning poverty wages or the minimum wage.

The IWW immediately set about changing this situation, launching a campaign for the London living wage. This campaign garnered widespread publicity and a motion in Parliament. Our members stood firm in the face of the intimidation of the management company Cashmens, who also managed Heron Tower.

On March 8, the IWW in Frankfurt and industrial unionists in Warsaw and Tokyo initially planned solidarity demonstrations at the offices of the Macquarie Global

Property Advisors Limited (MGPA), owners of Exchange Tower, but the employers conceded to the demands of the workers before these demonstrations took place.

Unfortunately, some of the traditional unions at Canary Wharf have abandoned the cleaners. Full-time union officials even declared, “You need to keep your head down in a recession.”

The IWW has continued to fight—organizing the unorganized, the abandoned and the betrayed. At Reuters, the IWW is engaged in another campaign for the London living wage and for the removal of a gang of feral managers who are intimidating cleaners.

The gains at Exchange Tower send a clear message that solidarity wins justice in the workplace! Thank you to all our members and supporters.

IWW Launches In Uganda

By Weijagye Justus

The recent meeting of fellow workers in Uganda to form a Regional Organizational Committee (ROC) was a landmark in the history of the IWW, and the springboard for similar emerging ROCs on the African continent. We put in unending zeal and effort to work not only as a union, but also toward our main goal of abolishing the wage system.

As workers of the world, we exist as one people who are in need of each other, and all of whom have the same basic needs. There is far more that unites us than can ever divide us along cultural, nationalistic or religious lines. Together we can create a civilization worth living in. Before that happens we need the conscious cooperation of all workers across the world, united in one common cause—to create a world in which each person has free access to the benefits of civilization. A world without frontiers or borders, social classes or leaders and a world in which production is at last freed from the artificial shackles

of profit and used for the good of humanity. A world in which an individual contributes according to his or her ability and takes from society according to one’s self-determined need. Through the IWW, we must bring awareness of this class war to our fellow workers worldwide.

Our objective is to obtain what is not currently in the possession of our class—the earth and its natural and industrial resources. The class war between the parasites who possess without working and the workers who produce without possessing is the real struggle that concerns us. As workers, our battle is to win the hearts and minds of the world’s people. Once we unite, there will be no force that will stop us from taking the earth into our common possession, consequently abolishing capitalism and the wage system that turns us workers into mere commodities for sale on the market.

The case for the abolition of capitalism must stay on our agenda until capitalism is abolished.

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Shorter Work Time Is Key To Abolishing The Wage System

FW Joel Schwartz writes in “Building The IWW’s Program: From Workplace Grievances To Worker Control” (January/February *IW*, page 4), “We should explicitly start to analyze how to build the bridge between addressing workplace grievances and the actual abolition of the wage system.”

Shorter work time is the key. As a whole, 90 percent of the working class gets about 12 percent of the wealth we produce back. At least this is the case in the United States. In Australia, 50 percent of the population (all of whom are working class) retain 7 percent of the wealth produced. Similar dynamics exist in all the wage systems of all the political states in the world. Anyway, the other 88 percent of wealth in the United States ends up in the control of the top 10 percent of the population (in Australia, it’s 45 percent).

What should be burned into our memories is that this dynamic of exploitation takes place over time. In general, workers’ share of the wealth amounts to 4.8 hours of labor time in a 40-hour work week. That’s the wage system for you, fellow workers. Think about it: if we were all organized in One Big Union and

demanded that we only work 4.8 hours a week for the wages and working conditions we now enjoy, the abolition of the wage system would be next to a done deal.

Every hour that our labor time is shortened (without sacrificing our standard of living or working conditions), we move a step closer, as a class, to the abolition of wage slavery itself. Further, shorter work time would move us toward more control over our lives and the wealth we produce. Shorter work time would contribute to raising our wages as the supply of labor power would be restricted, while demand for our labor would grow. As shorter work time would become the order of the day, unemployment would vanish.

For the works!
Mike Ballard



Graphic: niu.edu

Corrections

In Tom Keough’s piece, “Nigerian Workers, Students Stage General Strike,” (March *IW*, page 3), the *IW* inaccurately edited the first line to read “On Jan. 9, *thousands* of people stayed out of work and school as part of a nationwide general strike...” There were in fact tens of thousands of people on strike in Nigeria. The *IW* apologizes for this inaccuracy.

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Direct Unionism And Beyond

By Jomo

This is a response to “Direct Unionism,” a discussion paper written by some IWW members, available online at <http://libcom.org/library/debate-direct-unionism>. The paper proposes building networks of militants across industries. My organizing experience shows me the importance of this. I am a certified nursing assistant (CNA) in a nursing home and last year my coworkers and I organized against staffing cuts in a non-unionized, authoritarian, anti-immigrant workplace. It is crucial that we build a network of CNAs across different workplaces in order to counter the demoralization of working and organizing in this industry.

I work at a small facility in a large industry that has no standardized working conditions. Even when our staffing ratio went from eight residents per CNA to 10-12 residents per CNA, we were told that we are lucky not to have 16 residents or more. We are highly expendable as low-skilled workers, and the bosses use that against us. It is hard to put economic pressure on a nursing home where funding is a myriad of bureaucracy. We have to break out of a small-shop mentality or our organizing here is not going to get very far. In my view, for CNAs in particular, we should fight for standard conditions across the industry.

One obstacle to organizing is the role and rhetoric of the capitalist state, which views some people as disposable. Nursing homes and the health care industry as a whole are highly politicized. The mainstream media portrays unionized workers, or workers who struggle for better working conditions, as greedy and uncompassionate people. When residents are neglected, the media is more comfortable with highlighting the personal failings and character of workers. They are silent about the staffing ratios and working conditions of health care providers that employers create, and the funding cuts that legislators create that worsen the situation.

This allows the state to mediate the

rights of our residents—people with disabilities and the elderly. In state visits, they come and follow us, checking items off of their checklist. When we are unable to satisfy the tasks because we are short staffed, we are individually held responsible and written up for neglect and abuse as the management sees fit under loose state definitions, or we are threatened with the loss of our licenses. This is a major threat to our livelihoods. For workers in an already expendable, low-skilled industry, having a clean record is super important.

We also need to challenge the political narratives of the state and capitalists. We should debate in the realm of ideas about what health care, disabilities and justice mean. In my industry we do not produce lifeless products which we can abandon at will. As health care workers, our care for our patients and residents plays into how we struggle, and how our struggle is perceived. One reason why the state succeeds is because it is able to present itself as the spokesperson for the well-being of elderly people and people with disabilities in health care settings. We, the workers, need to break down that state monopoly and claim that role alongside our patients and their families. This is a struggle that is beyond any single workplace, and really is beyond workplaces altogether. This is a battle against the state and capitalism in the realm of ideas and analysis about health care, disabilities, justice and the like. These are matters that require study, conversation, debate and discussion. We won’t be able to win here through shop-floor conflict alone, with a simple story that we are workers. I don’t see any attention to such tasks in “Direct Unionism.” We should have an organization-wide conversation about what these tasks require of the IWW.

While I share the criticism that “Direct Unionism” makes of service unions, they put important resources into research—which, granted, is done after they have done their cost-benefit analysis and decide who is “worth” or-

ganizing/researching based on how dues-worthy they are. Whether lining up contracts to expire at the same time, or strategizing around who is the main target to publicize around nationwide, or coordinating struggles across cities, the business unions take this sort of national strategy into consideration. We need to develop an industrial strategy within the IWW, with similar considerations.

I value that the article emphasizes the need for anti-capitalist organization, as reflected in the IWW Preamble. However, the piece says little about what our anti-capitalism actually means in the process of struggle. This should be fleshed out more. In addition, “Direct Unionism” conflates non-contractualism and the anti-capitalism of the Preamble. In general, “Direct Unionism” presents anti-capitalism hazily. The essay makes it seem like we will do our labor organizing—organizing shop-by-shop—through direct action, until a big break happens in society.

I think it is less important for “Direct Unionism” to dwell on the anti-capitalism of the historical IWW than to clarify how we engage in anti-capitalist workplace struggle right now in practice, in the demands we articulate and in the way we organize ourselves. We need to have a discussion about how our organizing, over the long run, can prepare for a qualitative shift from a capitalist mode of production to a new form of society—one that is not a transitional state controlled by bureaucrats. This qualitative shift is a process that in-



Graphic: recompositionblog.wordpress.com

volves changing capitalist social relations. Even though this process can only take place during revolution, we need to agitate and educate around it now as we fight. Our demands should be directed not only at the necessity of better working conditions and wages, but also at breaking down the division between mental and manual labor, between gendered and racial divisions at the workplace and the like. I believe that some people in the IWW are already doing this on their jobs, but it would be helpful to have this clarified and made explicit, and this is something we would benefit from discussing organization-wide.

Another issue we need to discuss in the IWW is our orientation to the unemployed. The high unemployment rate in the United States reflects deeper racial divisions and segregation. A strategy for the working class needs to also include the demands of the unemployed. Those of us in precarious, low-wage jobs are not that far from those who are unemployed, in lifestyle and in prospects. As part of an IWW-wide conversation about vision and strategy, I would recommend that people read the “Workplace Papers” by the Sojourner Truth Organization—a 1970s Chicago-based radical organization. These are online at <http://www.sojournertruth.net/main.html>. The “Workplace Papers” articulate the importance of “independent workplace groups” that connect workplace struggle to community struggles. they are an important resources for us to bridge waged workers and the unemployed as part of the class struggle.

I raise these comments in the hope of contributing to and extending conversation around the “Direct Unionism” piece. I’m really thankful for and excited about the piece. Still, direct unionism as an activity is only the beginning. We have much more, in theory and in practice, that we need to discuss and work on.

IWW Constitution Preamble

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, “A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work,” we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, “Abolition of the wage system.”

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

Join the IWW Today

The IWW is a union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities both to win better conditions today and to build a world without bosses, a world in which production and distribution are organized by workers ourselves to meet the needs of the entire population, not merely a handful of exploiters.

We are the Industrial Workers of the World because we organize industrially – that is to say, we organize all workers on the job into one union, rather than dividing workers by trade, so that we can pool our strength to fight the bosses together.

Since the IWW was founded in 1905, we have recognized the need to build a truly international union movement in order to confront the global power of the bosses and in order to strengthen workers’ ability to stand in solidarity with our fellow workers no matter what part of the globe they happen to live on.

We are a union open to all workers, whether or not the IWW happens to have representation rights in your workplace. We organize the worker, not the job, recognizing that unionism is not about government certification or employer recognition but about workers coming together to address our common concerns. Sometimes this means striking or signing a contract. Sometimes it means refusing to work with an unsafe machine or following the bosses’ orders so literally that nothing gets done. Sometimes it means agitating around particular issues or grievances in a specific workplace, or across an industry.

Because the IWW is a democratic, member-run union, decisions about what issues to address and what tactics to pursue are made by the workers directly involved.

TO JOIN: Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month’s dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 180195, Chicago, IL 60618, USA.

Initiation is the same as one month’s dues. Our dues are calculated according to your income. If your monthly income is under \$2000, dues are \$9 a month. If your monthly income is between \$2000 and \$3500, dues are \$18 a month. If your monthly income is over \$3500 a month, dues are \$27 a month. Dues may vary outside of North America and in Regional Organizing Committees (Australia, British Isles, German Language Area).

☐ I affirm that I am a worker, and that I am not an employer.

☐ I agree to abide by the IWW constitution.

☐ I will study its principles and acquaint myself with its purposes.

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Supporting A Multigenerational Union

By Jeff Jones, Twin Cities GMB

Snap! Snap! Working-class revolution in overnight fashion. A spark lights when the general strike is struck, or so it goes in a good militant myth. Organize the workplace and the revolution will come. The first attempt at organizing may not be a win. The initial loss may lead to burnout for the young militant.

But working-class revolution does not happen overnight. It is multigenerational continuity that supplies the working class with its resiliency, its backbone. It is this backbone that creates the cultural structures that uphold a long-term, non-hierarchical, syndicalist vision and strategy.

Young militants have often had to recreate the wheel with each new generation. We have had to learn not just theory and particular tactics, but how to care for ourselves and guard against burnout. In contrast, a strong, supportive and relational community helps build our strength so that we can keep fighting against the Goliath of the capitalist class for as long as it takes.

The talk of building a resistant working-class community has always been with us, but it has not been given the proper treatment it deserves. Many young militant groups will signal that young children are not wanted at their meetings. This can come in the form of straightforward comments against having children at meetings. Sometimes it comes in the form of rolled eyes, snickers, sighs, or a belief that talking about childcare is not “their” responsibility. When childcare is addressed it is usually a parent who becomes the de facto childcare provider, rendering them mute at most meetings. If it is not the parent, then we tend to see the same people volunteering for childcare over and over again, as most people will not step up for this type of help. The volunteers also tend to be the few women in each group, thus reinforcing the patriarchal norm.

Having a multigenerational union is not limited to only bringing in parents and children but needs to include our elders. On occasion older workers who show up feel alienated or disrespected, as many young militants focus only on the newest and latest tactics and theory. Yet it is our elders who hold the living memories of our past struggles. They have seen many times what has worked and what has not. We don’t need to recreate the wheel each time a new struggle rears its ugly head. We can start from the rich history of solidarity of a multigenerational union. This solidarity and respect for our historical and collective wisdom will only stimulate new creative flowers to bloom.

Wobbly parents bring to the union knowledgeable ways of learning how to adapt. Fellow Wobbly and parent Nate Hawthorne writes, “Being a parent and being a Wobbly touch on some of the things I care about most in my life and they both

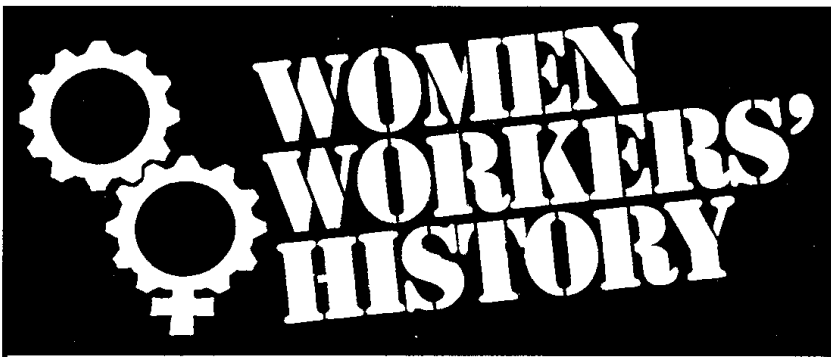
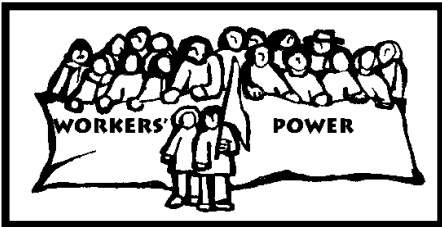
involve a fair amount of friction, and friction about important stuff can be hard stuff. I’m still a relatively new parent—my daughter is two. I feel like the first two years of her life passed mostly in a blur, and for quite a long time it felt like whenever I got my feet under me in some way then she changed again and there was a whole new set of things to learn.”

A multigenerational union must include those involved in their own families. An anti-authoritarian family knows that struggle is not about an immediate win, but about the future. We know how to take a beating and how to throw a party that night. The anti-capitalist struggle moves from a day-to-day vision of a better life of wages, respect, safety and self-management, to a deeper, relational understanding that this struggle is about our children and their children and all beings.

This is echoed in the words of other Wobbly parents. Fellow worker and Wobbly parent Madelene wrote, “I want, very much, to be more involved in the IWW; the work we do is so very important. Making a better world for my children is obviously one of the reasons our work is important, as is making the world better for the children of my neighbors, as well as my friends and people down the block, who have to work two jobs to pay rent on their two bedroom apartments.”

In short, fellow worker and longtime Wobbly parent Patrick said, “If we take seriously the idea that we ‘organize the worker and not the workplace,’ then we need to take a multigenerational approach to developing life-long radicals. While it is nice to have superstar organizers who make great contributions for three years, it is important that we start thinking about developing a sustainable culture of resistance and organizing—with less burnout and more changing diapers, less glory and more balanced roles. The old model of the heroic male is dying. We need to move forward with a new model. It is for these reasons that I will be attending and assisting the Junior Wobblies Camp at Mesaba.”

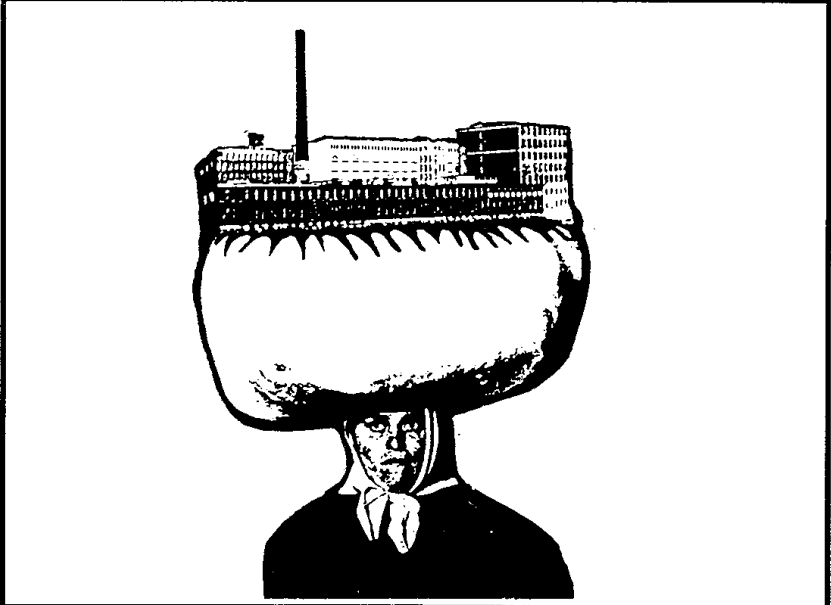
By supporting a multigenerational union we are actively showing solidarity for all our fellow workers. Solidarity will bring in new members while supporting active members. This support will increase the continuity of the struggle—continuity because the union will not be based on a few shining personalities but on the work of a multigenerational community. One can drop out for awhile, if need be, and know that the union will be there when they come back. A multigenerational union is the bread and butter of an industrial union.



CHAPTER 52

Rebellion in Mill Town

By 1912, Lawrence, Mass. had grown into an international textile industry center on the backs of women, children and immigrant workers. Twenty-five nationalities (speaking 50 languages) worked together in the world’s largest cloth-producing plant and more than two dozen other mills, and lived together in crowded tenements. Lawrence was one of the most congested cities in the United States.



Nearly half of the Lawrence mill workers were women and children, who worked hard and died young -- the average spinner died at age 36. The pace of work was fast, and accidents frequent. In addition to losing fingers, women and girls were sometimes scalped when their hair became caught in unguarded machinery. Low wages required the entire family to work, even children as young as 10.

The average wage (skilled and unskilled) was 16 cents an hour, or \$8.75 a week. This includes incentive bonuses, but doesn’t reflect short-time. It doesn’t include overtime payments, because there weren’t any -- even though the work week was 56 hours.

On Jan. 1, 1912 a new state law made it illegal for women and children to work more than 54 hours (but made no provision for protecting wages). The company’s response was to cut everyone’s hours and pay by two hours. When workers found their pay packets short 32 cents, they left the mills in droves, to gather outside in the snow and sub-zero temperatures. As the Italian workers said, this was the loss of five loaves of bread. It would make the difference between bare survival and outright starvation. “Better to starve fighting than to starve working,” workers said. Although the IWW had only 300 members in Lawrence, there were now 20,000 on strike.

(This is the first of a three-part series)

Graphic: Mike Konopacki

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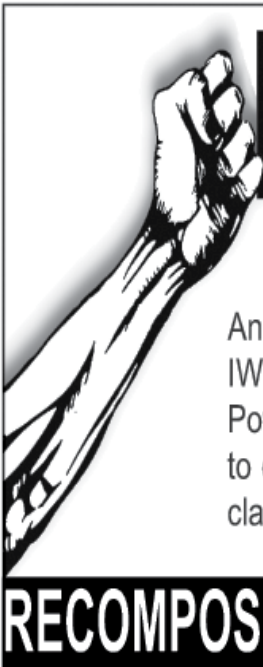
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RECOMPOSITIONBLOG.WORDPRESS.COM

Make Justice Prevail: One Guatemalan Woman’s Exile Saga

By Romelia Guzmán

I am an undocumented worker. I was trained as an accountant, a high school teacher and a psychologist, but that is another lifetime now.

In 1995, I left my house and two children in Guatemala and came to the United States on a visitor’s visa with my youngest child. My husband followed a few days later.

We had been radicalized in the 1970s by the poverty of Guatemala and a series of U.S.-supported military dictatorships. While working as a teacher, my husband was kidnapped twice by the armed forces and tortured. In 1979, he joined the Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA) and we worked side-by-side in Guatemala City in support of the guerilla movement. When my children were older, I too joined the group.

ORPA was careful to limit comrades’ knowledge of who was in the organization to one other person, so that if you were tortured you could only give up one name. Still when the government’s counterinsurgency campaign began, the death squads killed us off slowly, one by one. Friends, neighbors and family evaporated into thin air. My brother disappeared in the 1980s. By chance, one of my father’s friends saw him in a military prison and because my father was a colonel he was able to save my brother’s life.

One month before my father died, someone tried to run down my daughter and I. We narrowly escaped and I knew it was a message: Without my father’s protection, my children and I would be killed.

I arrived in the United States in a state of shock. Within three months, another one of my brothers was assassinated at work. There was no investigation. He simply joined 200,000 men, women and children killed in a U.S.-funded war

against “communism.” I could have applied for asylum back then, but this required that I remain in the United States until I was qualified. It sounds simple, but I was terrified that the children I left behind might need me and that I would be stuck here, so I did nothing when my visa ran out.

I started to look for any job I could find, mostly cleaning houses and nursing children, the sick and elderly. For two years, I worked for a newspaper. Sometimes I taught Spanish. I refused to use fake social security documents because I believed I had the right to work, an inalienable human right.

Fourteen years went by before I began to enjoy my life, because the past held me in its grip. The war, the deaths, the splitting up of my family between two countries—it seemed all I had were memories and nightmares. I tried to block them out, but I couldn’t. My mind was in Guatemala. I still dreaded what might happen to my children, who as adults became human rights activists.

Simultaneously, anti-immigrant fever spread across the United States, feeding my old anxieties. When my ex-husband and his new wife applied for citizenship, Immigration and Customs Enforcement told him they were going to investigate his marriage to me. This threat pushed me into a paranoid state. I dreaded being sent back to Guatemala as a criminal, with my hands and feet bound.

At times I wonder what will become of me, living between two countries. After a lifetime of work, I have no retirement income in either country, and returning to Guatemala is impossible anyway. Femicide is rampant, and the country is sliding backward economically and politically. In November, former General Otto Pérez Molina, a past member of the murderous

intelligence service, was elected president. My story is not mine alone. There are millions of hardworking immigrant women in the United States who every day face the loneliness, discrimination, violence and exploitation of being women of color, working without the protection of the law. Forced from our own countries by circumstances beyond our control, we are hounded by the Obama administration’s immigration police. But we are not blind.

We see that the poor people of this country are as bad off as we are and that everything is getting worse. Like other low-paid women, immigrant women are in the struggle and resisting, conscious that we must be part of bringing to birth a new day by creating unity among all workers,

regardless of race or nationality. Nowadays, I sometimes go to the local Occupy encampment and listen to the speeches. It makes me happy because I feel it is the beginning of a big change, part of which must be holding the U.S. government and corporations accountable to the Guatemalan people for the decades-long injury they have done to us, our children and our children’s children. We immigrant women were victims; but now we are warriors, fighting not just for ourselves, but for all poor and oppressed people. We demand vindication!

This piece originally appeared in Freedom Socialist newspaper, Vol. 33, No. 1, February-March 2012. It was reprinted with permission from the publication.

Industrial Bakery Workers Fight For Dignity In NYC



Photo: Grace Goldfarb

Continued from 1 supports the livelihoods of 35,000 workers and their families, yet jobs are plagued by wage theft, discrimination, and reckless disregard for health and safety. Focus on the Food Chain is a joint project of the non-profit organization Brandworkers and the New York City IWW.

“The city’s food factories and warehouses increasingly rely on a business model centered on exploiting immigrant workers of color,” said Daniel Gross, director of Brandworkers. “Employers in this critical part of the food supply chain must be challenged to abandon this model and

to provide good jobs. The Tom Cat drivers are showing that workers themselves hold the key to winning dignity on the job and in their industry.”

The workers have requested support from the IWW and allies as they struggle to defend their dignity, challenge the inhumane strategies of the private equity industry and create a food system based on human rights, rather than exploitation. People interested in lending a hand can contact jsanchez@brandworkers.org to get involved, and can connect with the campaign at <http://www.facebook.com/FocusOnTheFoodChain>.

Come to Junior Wobblies Camp!



The Junior Wobblies are Back! The Junior Wobblies is an organization for young people interested in the IWW, but not yet able to join. We focus on the creation of social, mental, and emotional space for the intergenerational working class in our own union, help support and promote kids’ own talents toward self-organization, and have craploads of fun. We hold an annual Junior Wobblies Summer Camp at the Mesaba Co-Op Park near Hibbing, Minnesota: the first instance happens this Summer, July 1-4. We have lots of fun activities planned, from swimming, boating, nature study, games, field trips, and much, much more, in a safe, supportive setting. We hope the Junior Wobblies will grow in breadth (lots of local Junior Wobbly groups!) and depth (lots of activity in each group!), and that by doing so, we can help support those who will be the active, organizing working class of tomorrow.

Want to come? email: juniowobbliescamp@gmail.com

Donate! Junior Wobblies tend to be unemployed, send your check in any amount to: Twin Cities IWW 3019 Minnehaha Ave South Suite 50 Minneapolis, Minnesota 55406



There is Power in the Union: The Timber Beast EP

“In a mass marketing culture, a revolutionary song is any song that you choose to sing yourself” - Utah Phillips

“There is Power in the Union” is a Wobbly DIY EP of old IWW lumber songs from the Pacific Northwest, featuring 5 tracks including: “Fifty Thousand Lumberjacks” and “The Timberbeast’s Lament.” (questions or comments: seancarleton@iww.org)

To order from the U.S. or Canada, send \$5 to Sean Carleton, 266 London Street, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, K9H 2Z3. (\$5 covers shipping as the EP is free. Donations are welcome and will be used to help record and make more IWW music available. IU 630.)

“Resist, Struggle, and Love Together” credit: <http://sambradd.com/>

Lessons From Workplace Organizing

My Body, My Rules: A Case For Rape & Domestic Violence Survivors Becoming Workplace Organizers

By **Liberté Locke**

A boyfriend raped me on Aug. 18, 2006. The very next day I held back tears while I lied to a stranger over the phone about why I was unavailable to go in that day for a second interview for a job that I desperately needed. When I hung up the phone, I saw a new text message. It was from him: “It’s not over. It will never be over between us.”

The next day I went in for the second interview. It was inside of the Sears Tower Starbucks in Chicago. I took the train to the interview, constantly looking around me and shaking. I needed work. I had just been fired from Target two weeks prior and had no prospects. I knew I would have to go through a metal detector in order to enter the building, so despite every instinct in my body, I did not bring a knife with me.

My mind was racing. I was thinking that I risked my safety by leaving my house for a stupid job that pays \$7.75 an hour. Aren’t I worth more than that? Aren’t we all worth so much more?

“What would you do if you caught a coworker stealing?” they ask.

“I’d tell management right away, of course. I’ve never understood why someone would steal from work,” I reply.

I tell them what they want me to. I started working at Starbucks on Aug. 22, 2006. That was a little over five years ago. Every year we have annual reviews where I generally get to argue with someone younger than me who makes significantly more than I do about my hard work, aching back, cracking hands, sore wrists, the bags under my eyes, the burns, the bruises on my arms, the cuts on my knees, the constant degrading treatment by the customers like “baby, honey, sugar, bitch,” and “hey, you, slut...I said NO whip cream!”, the staring, the following after work. I get to argue why all that means I’m worth a 33-cent raise rather than 22 cents, which is degrading for any worker—especially for a woman worker. Only for me, I get to do this every year just four days after the anniversary of when someone I was in love with raped me. My annual review is truly the only reason I’m reminded of the anniversary of the assault.

I wish I was exaggerating, but truthfully I’ve just toned down how I really feel about it. When I was raped I didn’t leave the house where it happened until the morning because I feared riding the subway home at 3:00 a.m. I was getting picked up in the morning by my then-best friend (and my boyfriend’s other partner) to head to her wealthy parents’ house in the suburbs where they were paying me to clean. Desperately needing to sell my labor in exchange for simple cash kept me lying awake next to my attacker. Not wanting to lose the gig had me lying to him—promising that I’d never tell anyone, promising not to leave him. These were promises that I wasn’t sure that I wouldn’t keep at the time.

It was when I was on my hands and knees literally scrubbing the floor of my friend’s parents’ house that it occurred to me that being poor was already an assault.

I stood up. I told her everything. I did not hear any supportive words. She said she was jealous, and I wanted to throw up. I told her to take me home and that I’d rather starve than clean her parents’ house that day.

She gave me the cash even though I was nowhere near done and drove me home. She did both out of a guilty conscience, I’m sure. I resent her less these days because I realize that my ex-boyfriend’s manipulative behavior had gotten to her, too. It was worse for her than it was for me though. I was getting out. She was deciding to stay and betray another woman in the process. That’s some pretty heavy manipulation.

In the months after the assault I went to therapy for free through a domestic violence program. I went through exercises that forced me to relive some of my happy memories of being together with my ex-boyfriend. I did not want to. We dated on and off for a couple of years and had definitely had some wonderful times. I wished they’d never happened. I wished I’d never met him. I did not want to remember his face, his voice, his scent. I purged my life of everything he gave me and everything that reminded me of him. My therapist wanted to get to the root cause of where the assault came from because I blamed myself entirely. Things were great before that one night that hit me out of nowhere, or so I thought.

After nearly six months of therapy we hit a revelation. My ex-boyfriend was always manipulative, always verbally abusive. He preyed on my self esteem and wanted me to be miserable so that I felt I needed him, and I’d crave his approval and attention. In the few days leading up to the assault I had started standing up for myself, not taking his shit as much. Refusing sex when I thought he was being an asshole, when in the past I would have caved even after he would insult me. My therapist presented the idea that he raped me because he felt he was losing his control over me. It was meant to break me, as you would a horse.

Through therapy, I started to feel like I was worth something and that he was the sad loser, not me. He wanted something from me and getting that something was not enough. He wanted my spirit and body—ownership over things uncontainable.

When I started to feel stronger and less afraid I really stopped being able to put up with rude customers. Not putting up with rude customers meant facing the bosses’ wrath when the customers complained, which then meant I had to stand up to my bosses. Finally the real opportunity came and not wanting to live as a victim anymore took the form of signing a union card with the IWW.

I learned about organized labor. I decided that if I’m not meant to be some man’s slave then why should I be a slave to a boss, a corporation or a customer? I looked at bosses as they sat in desks, sipping coffee drinks that they had me make them, and pouring over sales numbers they got because of the hard work of my coworkers and I. We worked ourselves to complete exhaustion. Mothers whom I worked with talked about missing their kid’s first step while making lattes. I’ve known many pregnant women who worked while dilated, risking their unborn child’s well-being and their own because maternity leave is so short and they wanted as much time as possible with their newborns. I knew the bosses and the company were responsible for the state of things.

The bosses were very manipulative—abusing you for many shifts in a row, refusing you breaks, calling you stupid, promoting people that sexually harassed you, giving you schedules that made sleep impossible, refusing raises based on petty things like whether you always remembered to wear the required black socks or cover your tattoos. When we started organizing they would behave abusively for days and suddenly throw a pizza party. The majority of workers would thank the boss and talk for weeks about how much they really cared about us. How kind they were. How lucky we were.

Suddenly all the abuse faded away and grudges were dropped. Bosses were welcomed back into group conversations and invited to baby showers.

I see no difference between this scenario and the boyfriend hitting his

girlfriend in the face and then showing up with flowers and candy, and the cycle starting all over again.

I am not ashamed of being raped or manipulated by my ex-boyfriend. I am also not ashamed of leaving him and trying to heal. I am not ashamed of what horrible abuses I’ve experienced and witnessed since beginning to work at Starbucks. I refuse to accept them back after a simple pizza party.

I don’t want pizza. I don’t want flowers. I want freedom from a life of servitude. I want an end to the abuse.

Yes, I could quit and liken it to breaking up with an abusive boyfriend but the next job would recreate the cycle. The next job would be the next abusive partner.

So I stay, and I fight. I fight through organizing with other survivors of the abuse, my coworkers. Well, at least the ones that have reached rock bottom and now want to climb out. No, not everyone when I meet them is ready to break up with their oppressor. I’ll be here when they are—when they, too, find their courage and their self-worth.

We work together to improve working conditions, refusing to give management what they want when they are being assholes, refusing them our labor, refusing the use of our bodies for their own desires.

Under this current system we must make money to survive. To make money we must sell our labor and rent ourselves away. This is already unjust and disgusting to me. I’m fascinated by the creativity, the skill and genius of the human mind and body. I feel great pride in being able to make something, teach something, to speak, to write, to learn. How wonderful it is to know humans are capable of so much greatness. The fact that someone was vile enough to exploit this greatness out of others for their own means with as little return to the person who created it as possible is so very heartbreaking. It’s the same heartbreak I feel when I learn of a person staying with an abuser and doing everything they say only to be beaten down again. I always wonder when they will leave. I wonder when they will fight back. I feel this way when I hold a coworker who is sobbing from being yelled at by a boss. I wonder when they will stop taking it. Many workers have. Workers who have started and joined unions—we are survivors.

These past five years have been amazing. I’ve healed from the abuse and degradation of that relationship. I healed through applying my therapist’s teachings to my life at work.

I refuse to be a victim any more. I’m determined to remember my worth and to try to help others heal from years of abuse at the hands of employers and customers. Healing like that takes fighting back. It is not enough to walk away if you still haven’t realized your worth because low self-esteem for our labor can just put us continually in the same fucked up situations. Before we know it we’ve been broken down quite literally and have nothing to show for it. The big bosses will have the property they purchased with the money they kept



Graphic: k-state.edu

from us. They will have the best doctors, their kids will receive the best education, their parents will be provided for and they will enjoy the fruits of our labor while we starve. It is no different than the significant other that swipes your paycheck.

The burns from the extra hot milk don’t hurt any less when I realize that each drink costs my hourly wage, and in one hour I will have made over a hundred of them.

Don’t listen when a boss or an abused coworker tries to make you believe that your labor is worth is nothing. Don’t believe them when they belittle your job because it’s in fast food, or retail. Whether you sit at a desk, deliver a pizza, clean a toilet, sew a pair of pants or act on stage in order to pay your bills, remember if the bosses could do it by themselves they would, but they cannot. Remember they need you way more than you need them. Yes, the abuse can get worse when you stand up and fight back. Much like what happened to me. But if it took being raped to get away from such a horribly destructive relationship then that is simply what it took. If it took recovering from that to teach me about liberation and how to refuse servitude then so be it.

I will not be a slave. I will not be a servant. I do not consent to the abuse of my mind and body or the belittlement of my spirit. When they try to divide us it is like the partner that says you can’t see your friends. It is to isolate you so you feel alone, helpless, like you’re screaming and no one can hear you. Don’t let them do that. Refuse isolation. Reach out to your coworkers. Refuse to do unsafe work. Demand the money you deserve. Those that do the most work should live in the most luxury. We earned it. It is ours.

If you’ve found a way out of an abusive relationship or situation in your life then you know how badly you needed out. You’ve gone over in your mind a thousand times just how bad it could have gotten. You feel grateful to have walked away with your life. Imagine if all the horrible treatment at work ended. Imagine you didn’t dread clocking in. What if the boss now feared you? What if they wouldn’t dare hit you again, call you a name, and harass you? What if they gave you all your breaks on time and didn’t refuse your overtime pay? What if you set your schedule and decided the tasks you’d take on? What if you set your pay rate? What if there was no boss at all and we all worked together? What would it be like to finally be free?

Lessons From Workplace Organizing

Holding The Line: Informal Pacesetting In The Workplace

By Juan Conatz

Often when talking to people about their frustrations at work and the prospects for organizing, a common response is one of negativity and desperation, such as: “I could never get anything goin’ where I work!” “Other people don’t care,” or “It would be too hard.”

These types of sentiments cut across industries and sectors. Even folks in officially unionized workplaces that have unaddressed grievances feel this way many times.

But while your preconceived ideas of what workplace organizing entails may clash with the obstacles you think of, other things going on in your workplace perfectly mesh with what we commonly call “job actions.” Slowdowns, work-to-rule and pacesetting are all tactics that workers have used in response to management doing and saying things we don’t like. Most commonly, nowadays, it seems like our coworkers do these things as individuals, but when it expands beyond that, well, there’s an opportunity to get somewhere.

Background

In early 2010, I was working at a warehouse in Iowa City as a forklift driver. Most of my day was spent on the shipping side of the building, pulling pallets off the production lines and staging them in a different area so they could eventually be loaded onto trucks. I also spent a fair amount of time loading these trucks as well.

For the most part, the majority of my interaction with coworkers was limited to the other shipping forklift driver, the shipping manager and two to three temps who used a pallet jack to drop off pallets for me to stage.

The shipping manager, Phil, was basically a “lead,” with little power himself. Any power he had was mostly snitching power in that he directly answered to the warehouse supervisor. Phil was in his mid-40s and a casualty of the bad economy, being a recently laid-off worker at a factory that made parts for General Motors.

The other guy I mainly worked with, Bill, was a late 30-something, lifelong factory and warehouse worker who was also a farmer. He liked to talk massive amounts of shit (particularly to management) and was well-liked by nearly everyone, including management. Management not only liked him, but was a bit uneasy around him, as his caustic way of interacting would often directly challenge the euphemism-laden, corporate-style jargon and talk of management nowadays.

Phil, Bill and I made a pretty decent team. Bill and I shared the work pretty evenly and even alternated types of work so we wouldn’t get bored doing the same thing over and over again. Phil went out of his way to make all the preparations necessary to make our work as easy as possible. He even helped us out if we fell behind and covered for us if we got there late or had to run to the gas station for something (a big company policy no-no).

Increased Overtime

When the company started requiring 10-15 hours of overtime a week, we’d start the day finding out what needed to be done by each of us, so at least one or two of us could leave early. When the company started pressuring us to take 18 ½ hour shifts, Bill and I alternated them. But while we had some independence in our work, the “line leaders” who were hired on with the company and did the setup, paperwork and headed up the lines the numerous temps worked on, did not. Some of them were being pressured to work 90-hour weeks.

While some of the single guys had no problem with this, and bragged and

looked forward to their larger than usual paychecks, older line leaders and those with families were stressed out.

Some of the other, older forklift drivers didn’t seem to mind the hours, though. Sure, they were aggravated, but they also walked with the limp. If you’ve ever worked in factories or warehouses, you’ve probably noticed there are people that have what I call the “the factory limp.” It’s something that you get from driving a forklift or standing on concrete for years, as well as the inevitable injuries and long-term stress such work does on your body. A lot of people in the industry above the age of 40 seem to have it. In my experience these folks have worked jobs like this for so long they’re used to the nonsense and they reluctantly accept their situation and will deflect any criticism of it because they don’t want to even think about it. Why dwell upon something you feel powerless to change?

Increasing Productivity and Our Pacesetting

While our hours were increasing, the company was also installing cameras and bringing in people from other divisions of the company to watch us work. These people were tasked with figuring out how we could work faster. Basically, their job was to squeeze as much productivity out of us as possible. Most of the lines running were already “fine-tuned” for exact paces, down to how fast the conveyor belts ran. Bill and I set a pace far below what we knew we could do with the hope that whatever the rate was raised to, it would still be under or around what we could handle.

Apparently these pacesetting people somehow knew this and our plan didn’t work. In fact, it seemed to possibly backfire, with Phil being moved to another shift against his will, and a guy younger than all three of us replacing him.

Let me tell you something about young guys who are put into lead or management positions. There are really only two types: There’s the smart, most likely college-educated guy who feels he is eventually headed for a better job. He usually doesn’t try to bust your balls too much or try to whip you into super-worker shape. Then there’s the not-so-smart guy who thinks he is a super-worker and knows it all. In reality, he may be fast, but the mistakes he makes along the way make his speed pointless. The only reason he gets into one of these positions is through his brown-nosing or willingness to rat people out. This person is usually a rollover for higher management, as well. This new guy, Jesse, fit this mold to a tee.

On the first week as shipping lead Jesse tried telling me and Bill that the number of trucks we were expected to load would double. Right there, we realized that we didn’t fool the pacesetting people, and that also they moved in someone they felt would enforce these new requirements.

Bill and I talked again about setting our own pace, but this time not as low. In any case, the amount of trucks we were now expected to load was just not possible. Even while working at breakneck speed and skipping various safety measures, it wasn’t possible.

So we set the number of trucks we did each day. Jesse kept on us about it but the amount of verbal abuse dished out by Bill towards him ended that.

For a couple days, Jesse and higher management left us alone. Somewhat out of the blue, Jesse actually began being nice to us and even buying us lunch. I’m assuming upper management schooled him in some standard management skills on how to handle angry employees. It’s an old technique: try and gain sympathy and gratitude through kind acts and workers will do what you want more easily. Most

small businesses I’ve worked for have excelled at this strategy. If it was an effort to get us to work harder and meet this new quota, though, it failed.

Free pizza or no free pizza, we were now being made to work way more hours. We were now up to 85 hours a week like many others. Personally, it was starting to break me down. Hardly any sleep or days off was starting to make me see movements, and then eventually actual people out of the corner of my eye when I was driving. When I would jerk my head left or right there would be nothing there.

Organizer Training and Going Out in Flames

Right around this time I took advantage of my first weekend off in three weeks, and I headed up to the Twin Cities. I knew some people in the IWW through my membership in the Workers Solidarity Alliance (WSA) and found out there was an organizer training session. It ended up being really useful and I realized Bill and I were already following some of the tactics you follow when you organize.

Going back to work, armed with knowledge, I started to try and identify how we could get some more resistance to the increased hours and productivity. Looking back, however, I can see that the hours were starting to get to me, as I was making poor judgments and not exploiting certain opportunities that came up.

For instance, during a cigarette break Bill brought up an idea of circulating a petition to protest the increased hours and hiring practices, and then confront the plant manager with it. I tried to encourage him to do this, but in retrospect, I should have tried to meet up with him outside work so we could talk and get other people

on board.

My work started getting sloppier and then I began getting confrontational with Jesse in the same way Bill was. One day I walked into work and learned that Bill and I had been split up and I was now going to work in a role that would mean even more hours and fewer days off. Unwisely, I exploded and got into a screaming match with the shipping manager. I then walked off the job.

Conclusion

Although we never engaged in formal organizing efforts on this particular job, I learned quite a bit. I learned how my own intense hatred of my work conditions and of management could interfere with my goals. This is something I still struggle with. At times I’d rather try to provoke a fist fight or create a memorable scene rather than figure out a way to deal with my anger in a productive manner.

I also learned a lot about how we as workers will often be a part of what Stan Weir called “informal work groups.” We come up with our own ways to link with each other and resist what management wants out of us. While the working class has changed in many ways since the times when strikes and fighting back were fairly common, there is always going to be a natural urge to push back. These “informal work groups” are the building blocks of solidarity and formal organizing campaigns. Realizing and utilizing this can only benefit our efforts to escape the daily grind of work and capitalism.

This piece appeared in its original form on Dec. 20, 2011 on <http://recompositionblog.wordpress.com>. It was republished with permission from the author.

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The Survey and Research Committee (SRC) helps IWW organizing efforts by providing the union with useful information, research, effective materials, and other research-based resources for your organizing needs. We are here to help fellow workers help themselves by organizing effectively with the right materials, knowledge and resources.

Industrial Worker Book Review

The Fiction Issue

By William Hastings

Fiction tells the greatest truths. Now, at a time when the rich keep getting richer and the poor keep breaking their backs for pennies, a time when other book reviews fall prey to gross commercialism and review works that only reflect the lives of a small segment of our population, we thought we would not only offer up some deeper truths about how life in America is really being lived, but carry on a tradition of this newspaper’s great writers. This month, a handful of the best writers in the United States contributed short stories to the Industrial Worker Book Review. Here are writers whose work you need to know, the ones writing the great truths of our time. What follows are selections from a few of the stories. Everything may be found online at <http://www.iwwbookreview.com>.



From “Purple Jesus”

By Ron Cooper, Bancroft Press

Purvis shoved an empty condensed milk can across the dinette table toward boney, bluish Armeý Wright. “You got more room in here than I thought, old man,” Purvis said. “I guess some things are bigger on the inside than they look from the outside. That’s more work for me.”

He slid another condensed milk can across the gray mica tabletop. It stopped on the edge, hovering over Armeý’s lap. “Touchdown!” Purvis said. “Now you supposed to make a goalpost with your fingers for me to kick the extra point, but we can skip that part.”

Armeý’s head was tilted toward his left shoulder as if he were coursing a distant sound. His glasses, with the one blackened lens, had slipped to the end of his nose, exposing one eye squinting, the other completely white with just an outline of iris. One shiny hand clutched the front of his green coveralls as if trying to unsnap them.

Purvis stood and picked up the crowbar from the top of the stove. “I’m going to try that room with all them books in it,” he said. “They got a liberry in town, you know. I might have to come back tomorrow if I can’t find it there.” He kicked aside more empty condensed milk cans and stepped over the pots (a two-quart and a stew size), a skillet, three coffee cans (one filled with spoons, one with finishing nails and wood screws, and one with empty aspirin bottles), and two blue willow plates (now broken) that he had dumped from the screened pie safe.

If only the storied million had been in one of those coffee cans, where normal people keep their rainy-day dollars, Purvis wouldn’t have to tear down half the house. This was all Armeý’s fault, Purvis thought. The old man knew this day was coming, what with everybody knowing he was rich and all, so why’d he have to make it so hard? Nobody likes to ruin a house like this, but by God, Purvis was not the one who hid it.



Ron Cooper.

Tear Down

An excerpt from “A Home No More”

By Larry Fondation

Jackhammers struck;
The building came down –
In bits and pieces,
Then all at once.
Our candles and lights,
Crushed all at once –
Piles of stuff,
Gathered then scattered,
All gone, but no matter –
Here and there,
All over –
She and I,
She and I.



Larry Fondation.

**

I think they think it’s good
When they raze the building we live in,
Brick by brick,
Board by board,
But we have nowhere, nowhere to go,
But it’s OK,
We have no rent to pay.

Begging. Asking. Asking questions. Asking for money.
Beg the question. Beg for money. Mendicancy. Beggar.
Baker. Candlemaker. Thief. Gandhi in rags. Alms. Begging
for alms. Asking for alms. What are alms? Are you asking for
help? Help? What? No. Signs of brown cardboard, lettered
with Sharpies. Black, but sometimes, blue or red. Is washing
windows work? Antonio and Jan and the Central City Asso-
ciation. On the corner with NBC, ABC, CNN, all the above,
alphabet soup, but just for this one day, one day, this one day
only. Not me. Every day. Asking. Asking ultimate questions:
A dollar. A quarter. A song on the radio. A Siren. A siren.
Is it raining? I have no Suitors. I have Omensetter’s Luck.

**

The birds flew up and over us some place.
Rubble strewn on desktops;
Broken coffee,
Torn tea and trash.
Leaves eat the sun and the air.
Scattered sheets of glass,
Shattered, then reformed.
We come from ice.

**

Scrap and detritus are my substance,
Jackhammers cracking concrete,
Carving out letters,
Cutting asphalt,
Spelling out words.
Beetles face off on the curbstone,
Screaming war cries,
Ants burdened by armor and ammunition.

Mud and rain and plant parts...
They were replacing the parking meters on San Pedro.

Curbstones broken,
Shattered asphalt,
Chopped into chunks by graphic assault.
I have a brass scale:
No matter how much weight
I put on one tray,
It still never balances.
Frames lack pictures;
Space depicts nothing.

The bare minimum,
So invisible.

I’ve sucked on she-wolves’ tits.
My brother and I co- founded Los Angeles.
Arma virumque cano.

Last Words on Lonoke

By Michael Gills

for Fred Chappell

O.W. bought me a .30-ought six the Christmas I turned thirteen, said, “Don’t point at anything you don’t want to kill,” and that was pretty much it for my gun safety lessons. By Arkansas spring time, when gold light flitted down through the new-leaf within view of the oak where we’d slung foundering Shawnee up so he couldn’t lay down and die, I unloaded on one of the cargo planes that ever circled us from the base over to J-ville, and the son-of-a-bitch crashed. The woods beyond the railroad track blazed. It looked for all the world like God and Jesus and Holy Ghost had reached down and slapped the shit out of the wood beyond our back pasture, then set it afire just to make sure we got the point. Nobody was killed—they found the ejected pilot in a Butlerville cow pasture, and turns out that it’s nearly impossible to knock a Cargo plane out of the sky with a deer gun. But for a long time, even as a grown man, I thought on those spent shells at my feet, each brassy cartridge the length of my middle finger. Night dreams featured a fuselage burning and hissing beneath the hickories, me paralyzed in my tracks, thinking Goddam. This is me. This is who I am now.

In his spare time, when he wasn’t driving the IceLand route or burning somebody’s house down for money, O.W. studied Veterinary with Mr. Carl who’d taught him how to do hyperdermic injections and gelding. He’d learned that a foundering horse had to be kept on its feet at all cost, slung up from a barn beam, or an Oak in our case, fed only a little and watered, and not allowed to stump-suck as the foundering are apt. Uncle’d given me the red horse after the house fire, when a cinder from the about to collapse roof had seared its way into O.W.’s chest, so he got out in his underwear, just barely, and put down the bottle and got Jesus, so we’d all moved to Lonoke where First Baptist held monthly revivals. My little brother Jimmy and Traceleen hadn’t a clue where they stood in life, and thirteen-year-old me—what did I know? So when the plane crashed, I shoved the five hot casings into my front pocket and ran like a mother, the fear on me for real. But of course, there’s never any getting away from something big as all that.

Across the pasture, the horse hung slack. I whistled him, the high note rising and falling. But Shawnee hung still, the red mane wafting in the breeze, glistening like the day Uncle’d given him. Up close, his brown eyes were stuck wide open—fear, terror even, there. A siren wailed off Old 38, the curve drunks were always missing so we’d find them in the morning with Kentucky woodfence draped around their bumpers. My horse was dead. And for my whole life I’ve wondered if I killed him. Had this good-hearted being, who’d seen me through the shit my people were all the time perpetuating, had he died of terror when I made the fire rain down?

Hi Mister, I’m fuck up, I said in the dark barn where I hid from all the Air Force geeks come walking up the pasture path with little spiral notebooks, stub-nose pencils stuck through the looped wires. One carried a Geiger counter, I swear to God. Another walked a big-bellied hound. For a good while they took pictures and gathered up wreckage in Hefty bags, right out there on the other side of the tracks. A story’d appear in the Lonoke Star about how the pilot parachuted down into a Butlerville cow pasture where Phillip Tucker rescued him from a Charolais bull who’d horned one of his pant legs off. A black and white shot showed the burned up piece of woods that I’d revisit through the years, find a scrap here, a ribbon of burnt wire there, remember how the ought-six nailed my shoulder as I pulled the trigger—one, two, three, four, five. Something had taken hold of me, I could feel it, my nuts had dropped and my voice had changed and my body seemed to want to join some dark force aligned with O.W. and his kind.



Michael Gills.

Industrial Worker Book Review

The Fiction Issue

Violent Spring

An excerpt from the novel
By Gary Phillips

IVAN MONK WONDERED if he was the only one who got the joke. Standing next to his mother and sister at the groundbreaking of the future shopping complex at the corner of Florence and Normandie in South Central Los Angeles, the private eye remembered the maelstrom this intersection had been not so long ago. It was one of those significant moments in time, forever etched in the deep cells of his brain. Like the day and the hour he heard his father had died or when he was in grade school and a tearful Mrs. Rogers came in and told the class that President Kennedy had just been shot.

Wednesday afternoon, April 29, 1992 was one such moment. All of Los Angeles had its collective ear glued to radios a few minutes past three as the 65-year-old forewoman of the jury on the live broadcast read the not guilty verdict.

The incredible decision was delivered by a jury of ten whites, one Latina and one Filipina who supported the claim of the LAPD officers on trial for use of excessive force against black motorist, Rodney King. The four cops captured in a hazy and brutal cinema verite as they beat the living shit out of King on a Lake View Terrace street in the San Fernando Valley.

Monk stared open-jawed at the radio, his secretary Delilah gripping his arm, hard, in disbelief. Soon they both got that look on their faces one got from being black in America. That look that said, ‘Yeah, we been given the short end again, so what’s new.’

The city raged red with blood and fury. Reginald Denny, a white working-class guy, a union truck driver, was pulled from his cab at Florence and Normandie and senselessly beaten and shotgunned in the leg by young black men venting their anger in frustrated and futile fashion.

But having no established avenue of redress—indeed what had the incredible verdict delivered from the white suburb of Ventura’s Simi Valley said to them?—the fellaheen sought justice in the streets. Subsequently, in the federal trial of the cops, two of the four were found guilty. And a city short on money and hope was momentarily spared another conflagration.

But the fact that now Monk stood at Florence and Normandie at a groundbreaking site, a symbolic gesture of rebuilding at one of the flashpoints for the riots that ripped his hometown, was not what he considered the joke.

“Isn’t that Tina over there next to the mayor, Ivan?” his mother said, disrupting his reverie.

Monk glanced at the dais. The mayor adjusted a sheaf of papers held in his thick hands as he stood at the portable podium. On either side of the solid built man in the blue serge suit were folding chairs. Various city officials, business people and some community leaders sat in them or milled about. Councilwoman Tina Chalmers, an African-American woman who represented this district his mother lived in, and Monk’s old flame, sat on the stage talking to an older white man in an expensive looking grey and black flecked double-breasted suit.

“Yeah, that’s her, Mom.” Monk studied the man Tina talked with. He’d only seen him on television and in news photos previously, but you’d have to have been in orbit on a space station not to have seen or heard of Maxfield O’Day. After the uprising, as the rubble and rhetoric piled high, O’Day emerged as the silver-haired man on the white charger. Lawyer, businessman, developer, political insider. A Los Angeles mover and shaker of the first order who played an active role in the election of one of his boardroom peers as the current mayor of Los Angeles.

Maxfield O’Day was appointed, some wags say annointed, by the mayor and the City Council to head the official rebuilding efforts of the city. His task was to pull a consortium of city and business people together in an effort to infuse South Central and Pico Union with new business ventures. “To massage capital, to give it confidence in doing business in the inner city,” O’Day was fond of saying. Particularly when there was a reporter around. Of course, Monk concluded, if that meant being lax on things like environmental

Wobbly Arts

An Uppercut to Pizza Hut

By Sean Carleton, X364847

This is a solidarity song for the IWW Pizza Hut Workers Union IU 460 in the United Kingdom and for Pizza Hut workers toiling around the world to get a fair slice of the (pizza) pie! The video for this song features more information about the union and includes pictures from the Feb. 4, 2012 IWW Pizza Hut solidarity actions. Check it out at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/TheTimberBeast>.

Tune: “I am a Pizza” by Charlotte Diamond

Verse 1
C
We formed a union
G7
Of Pizza Hut workers
G7
We don’t want ‘no bosses
C C7
No forced overtime
F
We formed a union
G
And you should too!
F C
So come join our union
G7 C
It’s up to you

Verse 2
We make your pizzas
With extra cheese
From tomatoes
The sauce is squeezed
Onions and Mushrooms
We think you’ll be pleased
We make your pizzas



They’re union made
Verse 3
We deliver your pizzas
The pay is poor
But by fighting together
We can get a bit more
That’s why we’re in a union
Our voices are strong
So come join our union
And help the work along

Verse 4
Yes, we joined the Wobblies
Now we’re throwing uppercuts
We’re winning recognition
By organizing Pizza Hut
We formed a union
And you should too!
So come join our union
There’s work to do
Yes, come join our union
It can work for you



Graphic: Melbourne Wobblies

You Say You Want A Revolution: Occupy Movement In Need Of An Anthem

By Michael Collins

Perhaps everyone was spoiled by the 1960s. A miraculous confluence of artists such as Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, Phil Ochs and Joan Baez lent their voices to the anti-war and civil rights movements. Certain songs became anthems and rallying cries for an entire generation fed up with the inequalities that surrounded them.

Songs like “We Shall Overcome,” “Give Peace a Chance,” and “Blowin’ in the Wind” were widely heard at protests, marches, sit-ins and on the radio. Maybe the message was more easily grasped because it was framed literally in terms of black and white.

The Occupy Wall Street movement has been catching flack for not having a unifying theme or a specific list of demands. The times may have changed, but the universal themes of greed and selfishness are just as relevant today as they were 40 years ago. For a social movement to gather steam and really go global, history has shown it helps to have your message set to music.

In some drum circles, Occupy Wall Street’s lack of great protest songs is drawing criticism. The current employment and financial crisis might not be easily summed up in verse. After all, it is hard to find a convenient rhyme for the words “credit default swaps” or “financial derivatives.”

Old Town Folk School’s Resource Center manager, Colby Maddox, is the kind of guy you would never want to be up against in a music trivia game. He would destroy you, mercilessly, and with a smile. He believes that protest songs have a place in our day and age, but the overriding societal issues are radically different and the stakes are nowhere near as high. “In the 1960s, there was the danger of being drafted and dying,” he said. “That will really color your outlook on things.”

So where is the next Bob Dylan or Joan Baez? Joe Tessone of the IWW points in the direction of Tom Morello, former guitarist for Rage Against the Machine, and his current work, The Nightwatchman. Tessone also recommends Billy Bragg and Conor Oberst. There’s some good music here, but will it ever hold up against “The Times They Are a-Changin’”?

There are many musical groups out there today voicing their anger with the establishment. They run the gamut from punk to hard rock to coffee house



Graphic: The Depaulia

troubadours. Bands with names like Anti-Flag and Rise Against have claimed the megaphone and the microphone. While popular in certain circles, these angry bands still haven’t gained the acclaim and the popularity of their 1960s predecessors. Anger can turn people off. “Folk music has a politeness to it,” Maddox says. “It’s I’m angry and I’m in your living room but I might want to date your daughter so I’m reserved.”

War certainly brings us together—whether for or against it. Artists such as Pearl Jam, Neil Young, Ben Harper and Sheryl Crow wrote anti-war songs about the Iraq War. Steve Earle even camped out at President Bush’s Crawford Ranch with guitar in hand. That war is finally set to come to an end, not due to public outrage or the actions of people in the streets, but due to politics and budget constraints. Maybe the times haven’t changed all that much.

Social media hasn’t given us our pro-

test gurus. Instead, the internet’s crowning achievement thus far is Justin Bieber singing and longing for his “Baby.” Maddox points out a Chicago singer named Mark Dvorak and his song “I’m the 99,” which can be seen on Facebook and Youtube. It’s a timely and earnest song, and his heart is on his sleeve, but let’s just say it lacks the seething steam of Bob Dylan’s “Masters of War.”

Some of the folk legends are making their presence felt at the Occupy marches, as evidenced by 92-year-old Pete Seeger marching through Manhattan’s Upper West Side recently with two canes and chanting “We are unstoppable, another world is possible.” Joan Baez recently played at Chicago’s Symphony Center. As for Bob Dylan, well, he never stopped touring. He just stopped enunciating.

There are a lot of artists still fighting the good fight armed with nothing more than a guitar and a vision of the way things ought to be. They have big shoes to fill but have resources that singers of the 1960s could only dream of. For now, the drums still beat and the people still chant and sing. The overriding question is: Will everyone listen?

This piece originally appeared on Nov. 8, 2011 in The Depaulia. It was re-printed with permission from the author.

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International Analysis

Food Stomp: Nestlé Unwraps Corruption In Azerbaijan

By David Patrick

The world’s largest food supplier, Nestlé, has terminated shipments of all of its products to Azerbaijan. This unorthodox and unforeseen maneuver is seen by many as an attempt to avoid corrupt governmental entities, who allegedly ask for kickbacks or other illegal activities to participate in the Caucasus country’s business affairs. This situation marks a continuation of the general population having little say in the economic direction of their country and being pushed out of the way either by companies or their government in pursuit of money.

Founded in 1866 in Vevey, Switzerland, Nestlé employs almost 280,000 people in 86 countries. The company has been involved in several ethical and legal dilemmas in years past, which have allowed Nestlé to increase profit. These issues have crossed a wide range of human rights concerns. In 2002, Nestlé demanded of the Ethiopian government that a \$6 million debt be repaid at a time when country was suffering through a harsh and severe famine. An infuriated public demanded the company back down, which happened after Nestlé received over 8,000 emails and feared a product boycott in Europe.

The \$6 million debt could be considered odious and eligible for cancellation, having been incurred while the Ethiopian government was occupied by a military junta. The spending was completely undemocratic and the population neither benefited from, nor consented to, any expenditures. The payments, if made under the new government, would have forced administrative agencies to cut even more services to an estimated 11 million desperate and starving people at the time.

Now, the shipping freeze to Azerbaijan, which was enacted on Jan. 1, 2012, has just recently come to light in the West. Publication of the halt comes at a time when current supplies within the country are expected to run out. After inventories run out, stores in Azerbaijan will no longer carry Nestlé products.

Nestlé’s largest contributions to the country mainly rested with coffee, confectionery and baby food products. Nestlé has faced allegations of illegal or unethical business practices itself in recent years. In 2009, Nestlé was revealed to have purchased milk from illegally seized farms in Zimbabwe operated under the wife of despot Robert Mugabe. Zimbabwe is currently under European Union sanctions and Nestlé later stopped purchasing milk from those locations.

In addition, Nestlé was shown to have

used child labor at a cocoa plantation in the Ivory Coast. The issue was even the subject of a documentary film, “The Dark Side of Chocolate.”

“The [child laborers] would regularly work 12 hours a day and receive no salary or education. Girls were usually purchased as housemaids and would work a seven-day week all year round, often in addition to their duties in the plantation,” reported Interpol.

The child slaves were further endangered in the environments they were forced to work in, often leaving them vulnerable to poisonous toxins. The International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) specifically noted “the application of noxious pesticides.” Children are reportedly forced to work with dangerous chemicals and not provided with safety equipment.

Nestlé has also been criticized for its practices of deforestation in Borneo and other regions. Such actions threaten native animal species and contribute to global climate change as large and lush areas of rain forests are cleared out to harvest hardwood and develop palm oil plantations. The whole series of problems with Nestlé’s past, combined with the actions of Azerbaijan, raise the suspicion of the company’s willingness to put up with corruption as long as it doesn’t threaten the profit margin. The company seemingly waits to have attention drawn to a particular issue before correcting it.

Azerbaijan seems to be a victim no matter how Nestlé conducts its own operations. Despite being named to the Human Rights Council, several human rights agencies such as Human Rights Watch and Freedom House have labeled Azerbaijan’s status on human rights to be well below civilized conditions. Police brutality and political prisoners are commonplace. The city of Baku, Azerbaijan’s capital, has seen large-scale evictions, where thousands were forcibly removed from their homes to make way for parks, business plazas and luxury residences. According to Reporters Without Borders, journalists have been deported, imprisoned, and assaulted.

Despite the high standard of living and human development compared to other Eastern European nations and being a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Azerbaijan has had a long and notorious record of corruption. In 2011, Azerbaijan ranked 143 out of 182 countries on Transparency International’s

Corruption Perception Index.

It is this corruption which leaves the business and governmental interests in good standing while threatening the security of the Azeri population. In another example of corruption, companies are allowed to bring in labor that is cheaper, provided they pay a fee for foreign workers, and conditions at these companies are not glamorous. For example, the Mingachevir hydroelectric power plant ships in Chinese laborers, who are housed in filthy barracks and prohibited from leaving the grounds or talking to the press during their three to six month stay.

Meanwhile, government fees do not discourage outsourcing and sap political will to change the situation. “Most of the jobs that foreigners are occupying should be given to Azerbaijanis. But we see in practice that workers from Southeast Asia are more attractive for local employers because of the lower salaries,” said Sahib Mammadov, a labor law expert, citing a report from *The Asia Times*.

Nestlé had attributed the termination of shipments to “supply problems.” Invoking a sense of frustration and isolation from the market directly, Corporate Communications Manager for Nestlé Russia & Eurasia Marina Zibareva said, “The company doesn’t have the operational office in the country, we delivered products through the distributors.” However, many of the local news agencies in the region have pinpointed the cause of the delivery halt as being the corruption among Azeri governmental agencies—primarily Azeri Customs, which act as gatekeepers and exercise authority over what is able to enter the country. Other countries in the CIS are not affected by the halt of products to Azerbaijan.

“Customs in Azerbaijan is an instrument of power and control over illegal local market,” Chairman of the Public Association “Assistance to Economic Initiatives” (PEI) Mehdiyev told Turan, a news agency based in Baku. The very presence of a black market not only threatens corporate profits, but worker security and potentially public safety. Counterfeit goods, or goods not sold without legal protections, may be defective or dangerous to own or use.

The oil and gas industry, pivotal to the economic stability and success of Azerbaijan, is the rare exception. Often projects will operate under special contracts. This exceptionalism has led



Azerbaijan.

Photo: asianews.com

to serious problems for the workers of Azerbaijan. Even in regards to the establishment of a State Oil Fund, long-term stability issues for workers can be spotted.

The economy, despite strong statistics, has seen sectors dramatically falling as well as rising, leading to the concentrations of power that lead to many social problems. According to inside documents published on Wikileaks, the staggering decline in cotton harvests has led to the introduction of child labor in the harvests. This has now also branched into the worst forms of child labor, including prostitution and drug sales.

The lack of professional jobs leads children to enter the labor force and not complete their education. One teenager noted about the cotton harvest, “Why should I go to school? I will just sit there for no reason for two more years, and then I will come back to work here. I should start working now.”

What is seen in Azerbaijan is commonly referred to as Dutch Disease: an economics concept noting the decline in manufacturing and skilled trade positions in correlation to the boom in energy markets. This concept was first coined in *The Economist*, which noted the pattern in the Netherlands after discovering a large natural gas reserve in 1959. While it is economically advantageous for a country to invest in the sale of its resources, it should take precaution about the finite nature of natural resources, and without adequate preparation and innovation, the country’s labor force is threatened due to the difficulty in bringing manufacturing jobs back once they have left.

Despite recent developments in Azeri society and the national economy, the small nation still faces a variety of problems on many fronts. Azerbaijan remains largely contaminated from DDT and other toxic defoliants from cotton farming during the Soviet era. The booming petrochemical industry of the region doesn’t assist in any cleanup efforts. Baku was the world’s lowest-ranking city for health and sanitation according to Mercer Human Resource Consulting’s 2007 Worldwide Quality of Living Survey. Baku is second from last currently, only beating out Port-au-Prince, Haiti, the earthquake ravaged city which contains Soleil, one of the world’s most dangerous and unsanitary slums.

Nestlé’s termination of shipments to Azerbaijan marks a continuation of economic exploitation in which citizens have no say in the economic direction of their country. The livelihoods and working conditions of the people, in turn, suffer.

Obituary

Rest In Peace: Harry Stamper, Labor Folksinger

By Nathan Moore and Kate Downing

“The woods are full of wannabe, would-be, and hope-to-be songwriters who write songs that will never be sung because they are no good. I wasn’t holding my breath while I waited for Harry Stamper’s cassette. When it arrived and I got around to listening to it, however, I was blown over. Stamper was good, very good.” - Joe Glazer (“Labor’s Troubadour,” 2001)

On Friday, March 9, folksinger Harry Stamper passed away at his home in Charleston, Ore. Harry Stanford Stamper, Jr. was born Sept. 20, 1944 to Harry and Viola Stamper in Roanoke, Va. Harry wrote prolifically on a range of subjects, although he was best known for his labor songs and his work with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), his union for 37 years. His song, “We Just Come to Work Here, We Don’t Come to Die” is considered a classic in labor and folk song circles. The song is featured on “Classic Labor Songs” from Smithsonian Folkways and on the album “We Just Come to Work Here, We Don’t Come to Die: Songs of Health and Safety.” Harry’s

music has been recorded and performed by a wide array of musicians including Anne Feeney, Citizen’s Band and General Strike. Stamper’s lyrics were featured in “Sing Out!”

Harry wrote on every subject. The last song he recorded, “God, Guns and Gays” is a perfect example of his political work—no topic is off limits. But Harry had an introspective side (what he called, “self-probing, old bat ramblings”), as we see in “Song for Cynthia.” Harry wrote, “It begins when you discover what you might like to be and it ends when you find out what you are.” Here’s what Harry had to say about himself: “I don’t consider myself a labor singer, but I think I have written some powerful labor songs. Others have referred to me as a labor songwriter, but I prefer folksinger.” Harry was generous with his songs. He was constantly sending CDs in the mail to anyone interested in his music at no charge. Harry said, “Do as you will with my songs. Copy, share change. It’s the folk process at work.”

Harry was perhaps at his most joyful in the songs he wrote for his grandchildren, like “Rockin’ Spider,” a rock’n’roll version

of the “Itsy Bitsy Spider.” Stamper also authored a children’s book called “Kevin Helps the Music Out” for his grandchildren and wrote numerous short stories about life on the docks in Coos Bay. His song, “Harry Bridges,” celebrated the life of the ILWU’s famous founder and was one of Bridges’ favorite songs in his last years. Stamper played at Bridges’ memorial held at Local 10 in San Francisco. Harry also performed at Pete Seeger’s Clearwater Revival Folk Festival in New York with Arlo Guthrie and Sweet Honey in the Rock in the early 1980s.

Harry loved his family: his smart, capable wife Holly Hall Stamper, his daughters, Nell Stamper Ero and Anna Stamper Brown and his grandchildren, Kevin, Stephen and Jack. His siblings: Patricia Howard, Tom Stamper, Cynthia Turner, Diane Stamper, and Richard Stamper. His sons-in-law, Trevor Clark Brown and Phil Ero. Harry loved, and is survived by, his mother Viola. He loved his dogs: Roodie, Lilly and Maple. All the cats. Harry loved to feed the fish, birds, Douglas squirrels and other creatures in his back yard. And he loved his union.



Harry Stamper.

Photo: Oregon Art Beat

Harry began playing music when he was 13 and he wrote and recorded music until the end of his life at 67. He said, “I’m proud of the songs that work and delight in following the muse that suggests a topic or direction. My idea is to create something useful, fun and just as relevant down the road.” But most importantly, “Stay cool and always remember to staple your picket sign to a baseball bat.”

Harry’s family has suggested that donations in his memory be made to the ILWU Auxiliary Fund: 2064 Sherman Ave., North Bend, OR 97459 or the Waterfall Clinic: 1890 Waite St, North Bend 97459. 541-435-7002.



The IWW formed the International Solidarity Commission to help the union build the worker-to-worker solidarity that can lead to effective action against the bosses of the world. To contact the ISC, email solidarity@iww.org.

Labor Solidarity Around The World

By the ISC

This year is proving to be a stepping stone for the global labor movement. The ongoing austerity attacks on the people of this world are seeing an intensifying response from workers and unions. This report highlights some of these developments from February and March, as well as an update on the ISC’s work.

Egypt

Egypt’s labor movement has been very active across the country with strikes, sit-ins and protests in the ceramics, fertilizer, steel and other manufacturing industries, as well as postal and transportation services. Egyptian postal workers are demanding an overhaul to their wage system and the ousting of the minister of telecommunications and his advisers. Postal worker actions are taking place in Helwan, Alexandria, Beni Suef, Menia, Cairo and Gharbiya. The Egyptian state has sentenced a leading figure in the fight to create independent trade unions in Egypt, Kamal Abbas, to six months in prison. Abbas’ “crime” was insulting a Mubarak-era official.

South Africa

More than 200,000 workers, including thousands of strikers, took to the streets in 32 actions across South Africa in early March. The call to action came from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and demanded an end to e-tolling, a contested electronic toll collection program, and labor brokers, who provide businesses with casual workers and enable the employing class to bypass post-apartheid labor laws. Due in part to the Southern African Clothing & Textile Workers’ Union’s (SACTWU) support for the strike action, 62 percent of the country’s textile workers refused to show up to work, effectively bringing the industry to a stand-still.

Estonia

Public transport, electricity and health care workers and teachers have recently engaged in waves of strikes in response to the Estonian’s government’s changes to labor laws that would affect wages, leave and social security. There are plans for these strike actions to expand to the rest of the transportation industry, as well as road maintenance workers.

Greece

Bosses at Helliniki Halyvourgia, a steel factory, had plans to cut the workers’ wages by 40 percent, despite a 30 percent increase in year-to-year profit. The steelworkers held a general assembly and rejected the cuts. The bosses retaliated by firing 34 people, and the workers responded by striking and occupying their workplace. The occupation has been ongoing for over four months at press time. With growing national and international solidarity, this action shows no signs of coming to an end any time soon.

On Feb. 20, the General Hospital in Kilakis was placed in complete control of its workers’ general assembly. The hospital’s self-governed workers mentioned several reasons for their actions, including severe wage cuts, wage theft, a failing health care system, and the global attack of the employing class on workers and the public—especially austerity.

India

Probably the biggest labor news in recent times came from India. On Feb. 28, tens of millions of workers in all of the country’s sectors went on strike, making this general strike the largest industrial action in India since its independence in 1947. India’s major trade union federations joined together to protest the neo-liberal economic and labor policies of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA)—the coalition in power. Since most unions in India are already allied with a particular government party, India’s labor federations set aside political differences to promote the interests of the working class as a whole within their political system. Their demands included the establishment of a national minimum wage, the end of contract labor and a ban on privatizing the remaining publicly-owned companies. Over 5,000 independent unions also supported these goals. Banking and finance in Mumbai were hit hardest by the strike, but many service and public sector workers also participated.



Photo: fuckyeahmarxismmleninism.tumblr.com

Workers strike in India.

During the first week of March, Ports of Auckland Limited (POAL) informed 300 striking union *wharfies* (dock workers) that they would be replaced in approximately the next six weeks. The International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF)-affiliated Maritime Union of New Zealand (MUNZ) has battled POAL since the worker’s previous three-year contract expired last September. The initial vote to strike by rank-and-file membership was unanimous, leading to a continuous stream of direct actions since November. According to MUNZ, “[POAL] has repeatedly undermined the process of good faith bargaining and attacked workers’ terms and conditions at the port, [which MUNZ] has fought hard to achieve over the years.” MUNZ is still attempting to bargain while the workers are striking, and international solidarity efforts are on the rise.

Auckland, New Zealand

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Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

WIN! After 10 days on strike, Kumtor Operating Company workers with the Mining and Metallurgy Workers Union (MMWU) returned to work on Feb. 17, having won all of their demands. The metal workers will have a 4.5 percent pay increase in addition to receiving over \$2 million in bonuses to compensate for increased government insurance fees. The MMWU said Kumtor had not put any money into the social fund since 1993. Additionally, the company agreed

Garment Workers Protest Discrimination

By the NGWF

On March 8, the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF) organized a women workers’ black flag rally in the city of Dhaka as part of its program to observe International Women’s Day. Several hundred female garment workers, along with some male workers, holding black flags high, took part in the rally. This was followed by a procession through important city streets and concluded in front of the NGWF’s central office.

Held in front of the National Press Club in the city at 10:00 a.m. with NGWF President Amirul Haque Amin in the chair, NGWF’s General Secretary Safia Parvin and central leaders Mohammad Faruque Khan, Sultana Akhter and Arifa Akhter addressed the rally, among other speakers. Labor leader Quamrul Ahsan spoke at the rally as well, expressing solidarity with the women workers.

Explaining the reason as to why the black flag rally was organized on International Women’s Day, speakers said they were protesting the discrimination created by the government between working women in the public and private sectors. They complained that the government had given six months of maternity leave to professionals working in the public sector, but only four months of maternity leave to women working in the private sector, including those working at readymade garment (RMG) factories.

NGWF President Amirul Haque



Photo: NGWF

Amin said, “The Bangladeshi women are naturally treated as second class citizens, hence the situation for female garment workers [is] far [worse]. The government, in the meantime, created new [forms of] discrimination between women workers and professionals.” He added that the workers, who are involved in production in the private sector—particularly in the garment sector—are mostly women. There are more than 3 million women workers in the RMG sector. In addition, even more workers are engaged in other non-government and privately owned institutions and organizations. However, there are a very few working women in the government sector.

The NGWF demanded the government immediately announce six month paid maternity leave for the private sector’s women workers, including those working in the RMG sector.

Addressing Bangladesh’s government, the speakers demanded the implementation of equal rights for working women, childcare centers in all RMG factories, and safe delivery facilities for the workers.

to compensate the family of Asanbek Orozaliev, who died after injuries related to the mine work. Canadian-owned, and the largest gold-mining company in Kyrgyzstan, Kumtor first attempted to declare the strike illegal and filed a lawsuit in a local court. Management later reneged on the claim.

Argentina

Dockworkers shut down Argentina’s primary port of Rosario in a strike beginning March 1, demanding better staffing on their shifts. At press time, the work stoppage has caused a backup of over 150 ships, bringing the country’s soy exports to a halt and pushing the price of the commodity at the Chicago Board of Trade up 7 cents to \$13.32 per bushel. Argentina is the world’s largest exporter of soy meal, a critical ingredient in animal feed and biofuels, as well as the world’s third-largest supplier of soybeans. Demand for soy is expected to increase as the global population rises to 9 billion by 2050, driving the growth of the agricultural sector in Argentina and across much of the world’s arable land.

Brazil

Truckers went on strike on March 5 in Sao Paulo, Brazil’s largest city, over new driving restrictions which prevent them from using main streets. Within two days, gas stations began running dry, creating fear of a massive fuel shortage. On March 6, a federal judge ruled that the strike was illegal and threatened to fine the union 1 million reais (about \$560,000) per day. The workers were still on strike as of March 7.

Police backed down on their threat to strike during Carnival in Rio de Janeiro.

The proposed strike had shallow support amongst the police force, and the leaders were arrested. The call to action was inspired by a police strike in the north-eastern state of Bahia in late January. The Bahia police strike was blamed for a doubling of homicides during that period.

Mexico

Tens of thousands of teachers carried out strikes and mass protests in Mexico City and several states of Western, Central and Southeastern Mexico on Feb. 2-3 in response to new education policies which will undermine teacher tenure by tying pay and job security to student standardized test scores. The demonstrations were organized by the Mexican National Coordinating Committee (la CNTE), a dissident caucus in the corporatist Mexican Teachers Union. In the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Guanajuato teachers took over toll booths and blocked highways, as well as occupied public buildings. In Mexico City, 35,000 teachers marched through the city, many of them younger new teachers, while hundreds blocked the Mexican Congress. La CNTE is well known for its role in the teachers’ strike which touched off the 2006 uprising in Oaxaca.

Be a Part of the ISC

The ISC has put out calls for two positions within the union: ISC Liaisons, who will help coordinate communications between IWW membership bodies and the ISC; and Regional Specialists, who can facilitate ISC work in different parts of the world. Union members are encouraged to sign up and help build international solidarity.

Email us at iww.isc@gmail.com.

Support international solidarity!



Assessments for \$3 and \$6 are available from your delegate or IWW headquarters: PO Box 180195, Chicago, IL 60618, USA.

